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SUBJECT: MGLE01: TRIPOLI SUNNI MP ADVOCATES A HARIRI  
PREMIERSHIP AND INCENTIVES TO BRING AOUN INSIDE THE CABINET

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

#### SUMMARY AND COMMENT

1. (C) During a 6/6 meeting with the Ambassador, Tripoli (Sunni) MP and Minister of Public Works and Transport Mohammed Safadi deflected questions about the June 8 session of the National Dialogue, in which he participates. Instead, he wanted to share his ideas on correcting what he sees as an increasingly dysfunctional cabinet. Citing a meeting he had with MP Saad Hariri in Oman last week, Safadi claimed that Hariri's poor relationship with PM Fouad Siniora will not easily be improved. Instead, Safadi said, it is time for Hariri to assume the premiership -- even if Emile Lahoud remains as President -- with a national unity cabinet that includes representation from Michel Aoun's bloc. Safadi said that he was ready to shift his four MP seats to Aoun's bloc away from March 14 as an incentive to get Aoun to play a more constructive role and break his alliance with Hizballah. Comment: Safadi has some self-interest in moving closer to Aoun. With personal ambitions of his own, Safadi knows that, as long as he is in the Hariri-dominated March 14 movement, he will have to defer to Saad Hariri on the premiership. End summary and comment.

#### DEFLECTING DIALOGUE DISCUSSION

2. (C) The Ambassador asked to see Safadi on 6/6 in order to urge the MP to use his participation in the June 8 National Dialogue session to help refute Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah's proposals for preserving the "resistance." Safadi agreed that Nasrallah's approach in the previous dialogue session was deeply flawed. He said that the March 14 participants would coordinate positions today and tomorrow. The Ambassador suggested that the National Dialogue, at a minimum, get Nasrallah to commit now to implementation of the Dialogue's agreement on Palestinian disarmament. Nasrallah, the Ambassador said, should also be cornered into ensuring that Hizballah's arms will not be used in regional issues such as protection of Iran or liberating Palestine. Safadi again agreed but did not demonstrate particular urgency, saying that the National Dialogue would continue for some time.

#### BAD RELATIONS BETWEEN SAAD AND SINIORA HARM EFFECTIVENESS OF CABINET

3. (C) Safadi then turned to the cabinet, saying that "it is simply not working." The cabinet is becoming more and

more dysfunctional, he said, a problem exacerbated by PM Siniora's "stubbornness on little issues." Describing himself as "disenchanted," Safadi said that he had moved from being a strong to a lukewarm supporter of Siniora. The deterioration in the relationship between Hariri and Siniora contributes a major part to the problem, he said. The Ambassador noted that a successful partnership between Siniora and Hariri was essential to the success of the March 14 movement, a point we were making to both men. Particularly given the increasingly vitriolic Syrian rhetoric against Siniora, it is important for Hariri to back strongly and publicly his PM, the Ambassador said. Safadi said that he was not sure that he agreed.

#### HARIRI TOYING WITH IDEA OF BECOMING PM NOW?

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14. (C) Safadi said that he thought the Hariri-Siniora relationship was currently broken beyond repair. Citing a meeting he had with Hariri the previous week in Muscat, Safadi argued that it is time for Hariri to become PM. If Hariri waits for a year and a half (the remainder of Emile Lahoud's extended term as President), "he's finished" -- the cabinet deadlock will have destroyed Hariri's and March 14's popularity. Thus Safadi said that he urged Hariri to take the premiership now, despite Emile Lahoud's presence in office. When Hariri said that he refused to become PM as long as Lahoud remained in office, "everyone knew he was just talking tactics," Safadi said. "He can change his mind." The Ambassador asked whether Hariri would really be able to work with a man he believes is implicated in the murder of his father. "I think so," Safadi said, hinting that Hariri in Muscat was already toying with the idea of becoming PM now, perhaps after the publishing of the Brammertz report.

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#### BRINGING AOUN INTO THE CABINET

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15. (C) In changing the PM, Safadi argued, "we also need to change the cabinet." He proposed giving three cabinet slots to Michel Aoun's bloc, at the expense of two ministers appointed at Lahoud's request (Yaacoub Sarraf and Charles Rizk) and one at Siniora's request (Sami Haddad). Assuming Deputy Prime Minister/Defense Minister Elias Murr continues his informal alliance with the March 14 alliance, that leaves the crucial two-thirds majority with March 14: 16 ministers, compared to five for the Hizballah-Amal bloc and three with Aoun. Lahoud would not dare to reject a cabinet decree that was topped with Hariri's name and included Aoun ministers, Safadi said. While Aoun would push for four or five ministers, Safadi said confidently that Aoun would settle for three portfolios.

#### PROVIDING INCENTIVES FOR AOUN TO MOVE AWAY FROM HIZBALLAH

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16. (C) Safadi said that, with such a cabinet change, he would also work to nudge Aoun away from Hizballah and back toward March 14, "where he belongs philosophically." Safadi did not expect Aoun and March 14 to enter into any formal partnership, for the distrust was too deep. But if Aoun could be lured away from Hizballah and into taking independent decisions based on principle, then the March 14 ideals would have a better chance of prevailing in any case.

17. (C) Safadi said that, as an incentive to get Aoun to shift in the direction he was suggesting, he would be willing to pull his own parliamentary bloc -- with four MPs from Tripoli -- out of the March 14 alliance and into the Aoun bloc, increasing its share from 21 to 26 members. There might be a few other defections from March 14, Safadi said, such as Metn MP (and Industry Minister) Pierre Gemayel. If

Aoun could have a bloc of 30 seats and be inside the cabinet, then he would no longer feel the need to ally himself with Hizballah in order to feel he has some power. The losses of seats within the 71-member March 14 parliamentary majority and within the cabinet shouldn't be a problem, Safadi said, since the March 14 crowd will be able to govern more decisively if the Aoun-Hizballah alliance is broken. Safadi said that he would use his weight within the Aoun bloc to make sure that Aoun did side with March 14 principles, in the parliament and in the cabinet.

COMMENT

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18. (C) There is increasing talk that Hariri might be willing to take the premiership now, rather than at the end of Emile Lahoud's presidency. With Hariri still out of town, we do not know how realistic this is, but we suspect that some people are engaged in wishful thinking, in hopes of finding a way out of the current dispiriting impasse. As for Safadi, he has some personal interest in what he is proposing. He knows that, as long as he is subsumed in the more powerful Hariri bloc, he has little chance of fulfilling his dream to be a serious contender as Prime Minister. If Aoun is strengthened as a result of Safadi's handiwork, Aoun might be persuaded to help Safadi. We hope to see Hariri as soon as he is back to get his assessment of whether the Hariri-Siniora relationship can be fixed, or what the alternatives are. We agree with Safadi that the current situation harms the reputation of the March 14 principles and players.

FELTMAN